

Trinity 21

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.

Well, James and John certainly weren't shy... They are asking to be the two most powerful people next to Jesus, as the King in the Kingdom of God, he keeps talking about. Jesus tells them that those two places come at a very high cost, yet they are still willing to go through with it.

They have lived their whole lives under Roman occupation and the disempowerment and oppression that came with that. The Romans would squash rebellions and hints of rebellion with merciless violence. So, no wonder James and John long to finally be free, and to actually have the power to change things and to no longer be at the mercy of others.

James and John are not that different from human beings of all times. We all long to have a voice that is heard, to be able to change things. We all hate feeling powerless and having no control over our own lives and futures.

Jesus understands the longings of James and John and of the other disciples, who got angry at the boldness of James and John's demand. Jesus also understands the longings we have today, to have our voices heard and to not simply be at the mercy of the powers

that be. But the thing is, power in God's Kingdom works very differently.

You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant.

Jesus is calling us to be a community of servants. And through his life here on Earth Jesus powerfully demonstrated to us, what that looks like. Serving as Jesus shows it to us, is not about who has more or less power and money. Serving is not something Jesus is *forced* to do. What Jesus shows us is a life of serving out of love and care for the other, selflessly and humbly. That is how he served his disciples, selflessly, humbly and sacrificially. Jesus became the servant of all and he is calling us to become part of a worldwide community of servants. Building a kingdom that works completely differently from how we so often experience power in this world.

But what could that look like? Let me share with you a story about the transformative power of such a servant community:

There was once an old monastery tucked away in a beautiful landscape in the middle of nowhere. For many years people would make the great effort to visit this monastery. People found the atmosphere of the place offered them the peace and rest they longed for.

There came a time though, when fewer and fewer people were making their way to the monastery. The monks had grown jealous and petty in their relationships with one another, and the tension was felt by those who visited.

The abbot of the monastery was distressed by what was happening, and poured out his heart to his good friend, a Jewish rabbi. Having heard the abbot's tale, the rabbi told him he had received a very important message for the monastery: The Messiah was among the ranks of the monks. The Abbot was surprised and taken aback. One among his own was the Messiah?! Who could it be? He knew it wasn't himself, but who?

He raced back to the monastery and shared his exciting news with his fellow monks. The monks grew silent as they looked into each other's faces. Who was the Messiah?

From that day on things in the monastery began to change. Simon and Ivan started talking again, neither wanting to be guilty of slighting the Messiah. Pierre and Ayo left behind their frosty anger and sought out each other's forgiveness. The monks began serving each other, looking out for opportunities to assist, seeking reconciliation and forgiveness where offence had been given.

As one traveller, then another, found their way to the monastery word soon spread about the remarkable spirit of the place. People once again made the journey to the monastery and found themselves renewed and transformed. All because those monks knew the Messiah was among them.

How would we want to treat Jesus, if he was hidden among the people we meet and share life with every day? By having that question put to them through the Jewish rabbi, this monastery and

the community within it were transformed. They became a community of servants, like Jesus calls his followers to be.

We don't live under Roman occupation like James and John did, but like them life has likely taught us, that being in control and having power is preferable to being at the mercy of others. Fighting for control and power makes sense. Because who will look out for us if we don't do it ourselves?

But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant.

Jesus calls us to live vulnerably as servants, not fighting for power and control, but serving each person we encounter with love and care, with no regard for the power structures of society. How would we speak and act, if in each encounter we have in our daily lives, we would aim to serve with love and care? How would we speak and act, if like the monks, we thought each person we encounter could be Christ hidden among us? In our homes, our work place, on the bus, in church, our neighbourhood? How would we want to serve Christ, if he was hidden among us?

Amen